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TAGS: [KNNP](#) [DPRK](#) [SY](#) [IAEA](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIA'S CLANDESTINE NUCLEAR PROGRAM

¶1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para 3.

SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) On September 6, 2007, Israel destroyed a nuclear reactor Syria was clandestinely constructing, we judge with North Korean assistance. The reactor site was in Syria's eastern desert region in a location called al-Kibar. On April 24, Executive Branch officials briefed Congress and the press on evidence that lead the USG to conclude that the Syrian facility at al-Kibar was a nuclear reactor being constructed clandestinely, and therefore in violation of Syria's NPT-required safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The briefing described the basis for concluding North Korean assistance and why the reactor would have been ill-suited for any purpose other than plutonium production for a nuclear weapons program. The briefings also included information on the U.S. policy approach following the discovery of the facility and the Israeli air strike.

ACTION REQUEST

¶3. (U) Posts should draw from the background information in para 4 to respond to host government inquiries on this issue and for press inquiries as background information only. The points in the White House press statement in para 5 can be used in full to address press inquiries on the record.

¶4. (SBU) BEGIN TEXT OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

INTRODUCTION

- You will recall reports that the Israeli air force conducted a mission over Syria on September 6, 2007.
- I want to inform you that the purpose of that Israeli mission was to destroy a clandestine nuclear reactor that Syria was constructing in its eastern desert near a place we call al-Kibar.
- The Israeli mission was successful - the reactor was damaged beyond repair. Syria has completed efforts to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what was really there, constructing a new building on the old site.
- We have delayed sharing this information with you, because our first concern was to prevent conflict.
- We believe - based on strong evidence - that North Korea assisted Syria with the reactor at al-Kibar.
- We are working with the North Koreans in the

framework of the Six-Party Talks to focus on North Korea's role in this proliferation activity, including as called for in the October 3, 2007, agreement, and to provide additional explanations as necessary.

- We have now decided that the time has come to share more information on this issue.

INTELLIGENCE

- Our intelligence experts are confident that the facility the Israelis targeted was in fact a nuclear reactor of the same type North Korea built indigenously at its Yongbyon nuclear facility. The U.S. intelligence community conducted an intensive, months-long effort to confirm and corroborate the information Israel provided us on the reactor and to gather more details from our own sources and methods.

- We have good reason to believe this reactor was not intended for peaceful purposes.

- First, we assess this reactor was configured to produce plutonium: it was not configured for power production, was isolated from any civilian population, and was ill-suited for research.

- Second, Syria went to great pains to keep this secret by taking very careful steps to conceal the

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true nature of the site.

- Third, by maintaining secrecy and not declaring the site to the IAEA and providing design information, as Syria's NPT-mandated IAEA safeguards agreement requires, Syria undermined the very purpose of IAEA safeguards - to provide the international community with the necessary assurance/verification that the reactor was part of a peaceful program.

- Finally, Syria's concealment and lies about what happened for months now after the Israeli air strike is compelling proof that it has something to hide. In fact, after the attack on the site, Syria went to great lengths to clean up the site and destroy evidence of what was really there. If there were nothing to hide, Syria presumably would have invited IAEA inspectors, other experts, and the news media to the site to prove that.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

- Article III of the NPT requires Syria to maintain comprehensive safeguards over all of its nuclear activities. Syria's IAEA Safeguards Agreement requires Syria to make early declaration of any new nuclear facilities. Specifically, Syria is legally obligated to inform the IAEA of such new facilities at the time a decision is taken to build them. Syria, however, failed to make such a declaration to the IAEA, or to provide design information and access during the reactor's construction intended to allow the IAEA to verify that design information.

- If North Korea provided technical training, advice, services or assistance related to the provision, manufacture, maintenance or use of nuclear-related items subject to UN Security Council resolution 1718 to the Syrian Government after the effective date of that resolution (October 14, 2006), this would constitute a violation of the resolution by both North Korea and Syria. Paragraph 8(b) of the resolution requires all member states to prohibit the procurement from North Korea of nuclear related items contained in S/2006/814 (which encompasses the control list of the Nuclear Suppliers Group).

POLICY DELIBERATIONS

- The existence of this reactor was dangerous and destabilizing for the region, and we judged that it could have been only weeks away from becoming operational at the time it was destroyed by the Israeli air force.
- Specifically, we assessed that once the pumphouse and pipe system were complete in early August, the reactor could begin operation at any time. Once operations began, certainly a military option would have been much more problematic with radioactive material present.
- We have long had indications of Syrian covert nuclear-related interaction with North Korea, and identified the al-Kibar facility in the fall of 2006 as an enigmatic site. In Spring 2007, we acquired information that enabled us to conclude that the Al-Kibar facility was a reactor.
- Information was brought to our attention at that time by Israeli officials who had conclusive intelligence that a reactor was being constructed at that site.
- The Israeli reports were confirmed by our own independent intelligence and analysis and were consistent with less definitive information we already possessed.
- At the same time, we conducted our own intensive internal policy deliberations regarding what to do about this disturbing and destabilizing development.
- We discussed policy options with the Israelis, but in the end Israel made its own decision to destroy the reactor. This decision was made by Israel alone - they did not seek our consent. Nonetheless, we understand Israel's decision.
- Israel saw this reactor, and what Syria may have intended to do with it, as an existential threat that required it to act to defend itself.

THE WAY FORWARD WITH SYRIA

- Syria's secret construction of this nuclear reactor is the latest in a series of unacceptable actions by the Asad regime.
- Syria is a state that supports terrorism, destabilizes Lebanon, and is the largest conduit for foreign fighters and suicide bombers entering Iraq to kill Iraqis, Americans, and Coalition forces.
- The Syrian Government supports terrorist groups such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hizballah, and others, including by playing host to leaders of some of these groups.
- Syria is a proliferator in every sense - of terrorism, of instability to its neighbors, including Lebanon, and now as a recipient and developer of dangerous nuclear technology.
- The Syrian regime, in going down this path, has shown a disregard for the security of the region and of its own people.
- We call upon the Syrian regime to reveal the full extent of its nuclear activities, as it is required to do under the NPT and its safeguards agreement, and verify that its covert nuclear-related activities have stopped.
- For better relations with the international

community, in addition to full disclosure and cooperation regarding its covert nuclear program, Syria needs to end support for insurgents and foreign fighters in Iraq, support for Palestinian terrorists, and interference in Lebanon. If willing to do so, Syria can expect to be welcomed by the international community.

THE WAY FORWARD -- SIX-PARTY TALKS

- In September 2007, the U.S. began raising its concerns with North Korea about nuclear cooperation with Syria. We have also raised this matter with the other participants in the Six-Party Talks.
- We have made our concerns known to North Korea in a frank and comprehensive way. The North Koreans have acknowledged our concerns.
- The North Koreans have stated that there is no ongoing nuclear cooperation with any foreign country in violation of applicable domestic and international laws and treaties, and that there will be no such cooperation in the future.
- North Korea has agreed to cooperate on verification activities in line with its past commitments on non-proliferation, including as stated in the October 3, 2007, agreement, and to provide additional explanations as necessary.
- We have been following Syrian/North Korean interactions since the destruction of the reactor, and we have not seen the same level of interaction as we did before the reactor's destruction, however we cannot be certain all cooperation has ceased.
- We continue to be on alert for signs of any nuclear cooperation, and any renewed activities.
- We remain attuned to potential North Korean relationships worldwide, especially given North Korea's continued proliferation of missiles and other weapons. We plan to follow up on North Korea's agreement to cooperate on verification and to provide further explanations as necessary.
- We are working with the Chinese to establish such a mechanism within the Six Party framework to address proliferation concerns.

CONCLUSION

- We cannot allow the world's most dangerous weapons to fall into the hands of the world's most dangerous regimes. This is the policy we have applied with respect to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, and it is the policy that we continue to pursue. We are concerned by the cooperation between regimes that sponsor proliferation, especially when those same regimes also sponsor terrorism and foster instability.
- A Syrian nuclear weapons capability would have been a catastrophic development for the Middle East and the world. It could spark a nuclear arms race in the region, and could escalate already high tensions with unpredictable and dire consequences.
- The international community must come together to put a stop to dangerous behavior such as this. There is a consensus among nations that proliferation cannot be tolerated. This episode reminds us of the dangers of proliferation and that we must rededicate ourselves and act cooperatively to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

END TEXT OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

15. (U) BEGIN TEXT OF PRESS STATEMENT:

Today, administration officials have briefed select Congressional committees on an issue of great international concern. Until Sept. 6, 2007, the Syrian regime was building a covert nuclear reactor in its eastern desert capable of producing plutonium. We are convinced, based on a variety of information, that North Korea assisted Syria's covert nuclear activities. We have good reason to believe that reactor, which was damaged beyond repair on Sept. 6 of last year, was not intended for peaceful purposes. Carefully hidden from view, the reactor was not configured for such purposes. In defiance of its international obligations, Syria did not inform the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the construction of the reactor, and, after it was destroyed, the regime moved quickly to bury evidence of its existence. This cover-up only served to reinforce our confidence that this reactor was not intended for peaceful activities.

We are briefing the IAEA on this intelligence. The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities. The Syrian regime supports terrorism, takes action that destabilizes Lebanon, allows the transit of some foreign fighters into Iraq, and represses its own people. If Syria wants better relations with the international community, it should put an end to these activities.

We have long been seriously concerned about North Korea's nuclear weapons program and its proliferation activities. North Korea's clandestine nuclear cooperation with Syria is a dangerous manifestation of those activities. One way we have chosen to deal with this problem is through the Six Party Framework. Through this process we are working with our partners to achieve the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The United States is also committed to ensuring that North Korea does not further engage in proliferation activities. We will work with our partners to establish in the Six Party Framework a rigorous verification mechanism to ensure that such conduct and other nuclear activities have ceased.

The construction of this reactor was a dangerous and potentially destabilizing development for the region and the world. This is particularly true because it was done covertly and in violation of the very procedures designed to reassure the world of the peaceful intent of nuclear activities. This development also serves as a reminder that often the same regimes that sponsor proliferation also sponsor terrorism and foster instability, and cooperate with one another in doing so. This underscores that the international community is right to be very concerned about the nuclear activities of Iran and the risks those activities pose to the stability of the Middle East. To confront this challenge, the international community must take further steps, beginning with the full implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions dealing with Iranian nuclear activities. The United States calls upon the international community to redouble our common efforts to ending these activities and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction in this critical region.

END TEXT OF PRESS STATEMENT.

16. (U) Posts are requested to report any substantive reactions as soon as possible.

17. (U) Minimize considered.
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End Cable Text